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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000378

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/14/2019
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SUBJECT: IRAN: KARRUBI'S ARREST APPEARS IMMINENT

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: There is widespread speculation that the government of Iran is moving closer to arresting Hojjatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi, the former Majlis Speaker and presidential candidate who has become the most vocal and persistent critic of the ruling establishment since the June 12 election. This speculation follows a series of moves by the government indicating Karrubi could be prosecuted for 'fabricating' evidence of detainee rape and abuse, as well as an ominous warning from Supreme Leader Khamenei during his September 11 sermon that opponents of the system, regardless of their revolutionary backgrounds, will be dealt with decisively (septel). Some oppositionist websites are reporting that Khamenei has already authorized Karrubi's arrest, and that execution of the warrant was only stayed by Expediency Council Chairman Ayatollah Rafsanjani's threat to resign his numerous government posts should Karrubi be arrested.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONT: As yet, Khamenei has resisted moving directly against the key figures associated with the opposition, no doubt fearing a backlash from both within the establishment and at the popular level at a time when he is working to restore a semblance of unity to Iran's fracturing political classes. It is reasonable to assume that he will only authorize Karrubi's arrest if he feels the firebrand cleric's continuing provocations are a greater risk to system stability than the potential consequences of such a move. Either way, he is unlikely to move against Karrubi before Qods Day (September 18) for fear of giving the opposition additional motivation to draw supporters to the streets. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) Over recent days, the government has taken a number of steps that appear to further prepare the ground for the eventual arrest of Karrubi and Mousavi. These steps include:

-- The September 12 announcement by a high-level Judiciary panel that the evidence of rape and other forms of detainee abuse documented and put forward by Karrubi was knowingly fabricated in order to discredit the government and to agitate public opinion. The committee further recommended that "those involved in the process" of compiling the allegations should be prosecuted, and subsequently Judiciary Head Larijani endorsed

the findings of this investigative committee.

-- Arrests of the top aides to both Mousavi and Karrubi, including Dr. Alireza Beheshti, who was held several days before being released September 13 on \$500,000 bail. (NOTE: Beheshti, Mousavi's closest advisor and his point person on detainee abuse, was long thought inviolable because of his father's status as a martyred icon of the Revolution and a peer of Ayatollah Khomeini. END NOTE)

-- Issuance of an arrest warrant in early September for Karrubi's son on charges of financial wrongdoing.

-- Closure of Karrubi's office on September 7 and the subsequent blocking of the website of his political party, Etemad-e Melli.

-- The September 12 move by the Supreme Council of National Security to ban mention of Mousavi, Karrubi and the June 12 presidential election by the Iranian press.

14. (C) IRPO contacts reflect a growing consensus among Iran observers that the above steps indicate the government is steadily inching toward direct confrontation with the key leadership figures of the "Green Wave" opposition, should they not back down. Karrubi is widely believed to be the most vulnerable, given his persistent and scathing criticism of Ahmadinejad and the government's conduct after the election. A Dubai-based political analyst characterized Karrubi's arrest as a matter of "when" rather than "if." Indeed, a story citing

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sources "close to Rafsanjani" emerged on many opposition and reformist websites September 13 alleging that Khamenei has already authorized Karrubi's arrest, and that the former Majlis Speaker remains free only because Rafsanjani personally intervened with the Supreme Leader and threatened to resign his many government posts if the warrant was executed.

15. (C) COMMENT: "Qods Day" Friday, September 18, is traditionally a time when the Iranian government tries to mobilize large street demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause. This year the opposition plans to use Qods day as a show of strength of its own numbers, correctly assessing that the government would lose too much face by canceling this event. As such, it is unlikely that the regime will risk inciting oppositionists even further by a Karrubi arrest before this event. Similarly, the government may wish to give Karrubi a few days to weigh the benefits of not escalating but rather remaining quiet in the face of the Judiciary panel's finding. However, if Karrubi continues on his current incendiary path it seems likely that the government will move against him, with no one knowing the consequences of such an escalation. END COMMENT.
EYRE